

BRITAIN’S “ARMENIAN POLICY” IN THE CAUCASUS AND PLACE OF THE PROBLEM IN BRITISH ARCHIVES (1917-1920)

*The end. For the beginning, see IRS- Heritage 3 (27) 2016, 4 (28) 2016,
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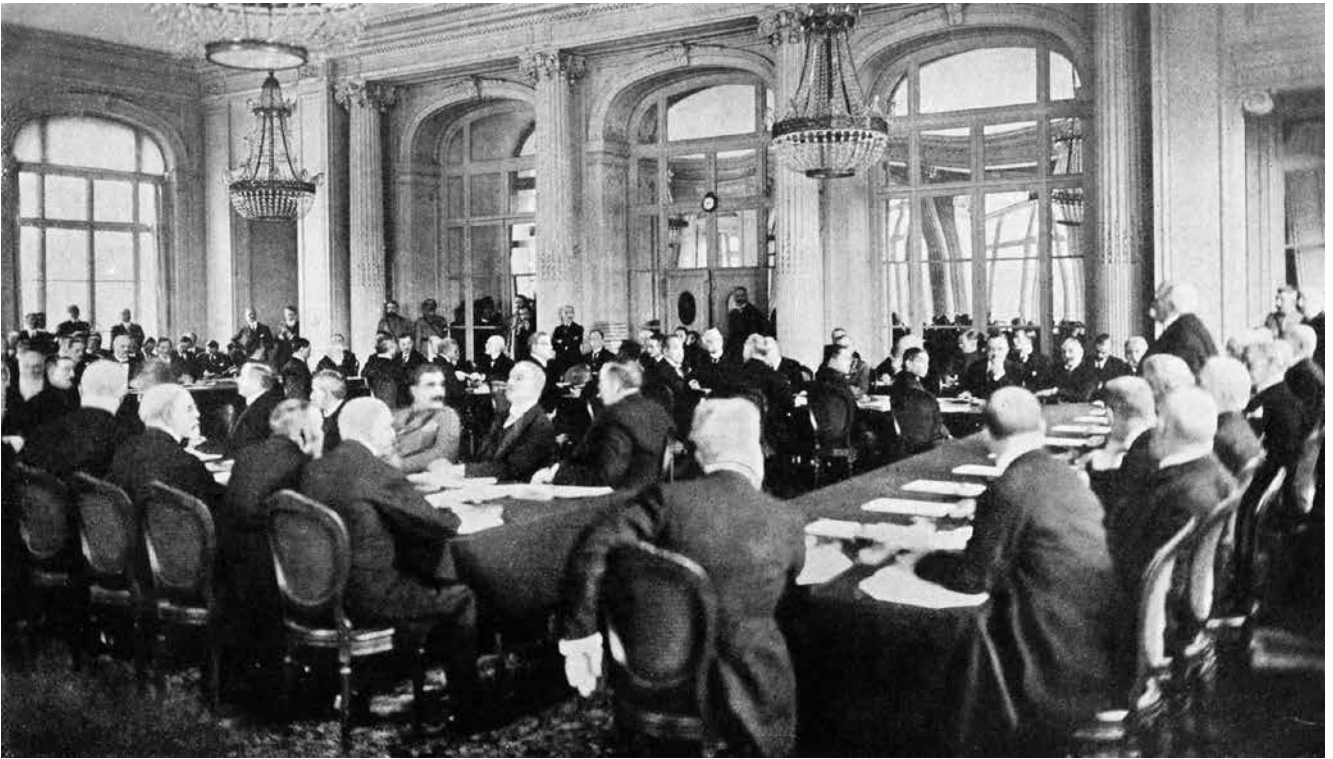
The head of the delegation of the Republic of Armenia, M. Aharonian, also asked for urgent British aid in a letter to Prime Minister Lloyd George on 11 August 1919 (2).

Armenians who lived in Britain at the time also described the departure of the British as a move that would prepare the ground for their extermination (3, p. 11). The Armenians, who characterized Armenia’s condemnation to isolation as a “disaster” in the name of humanity, thought it important for the British forces to remain in the Caucasus at least until a friendly power introduced order here. They believed that the British government should reconsider its decision to leave the Caucasus (4).

It was quite natural that the Armenians described Britain’s decision to withdraw from the Caucasus as a “disaster”, because the Armenians, who were placed under protection following the British invasion, were brought to Turkic-populated areas under British control and committed unprecedented massacres against the Turks here. This situation was also mentioned in a report sent by British General Alfred Rawlinson, who was in

the Caucasus at the time. Rawlinson thought that Muslims would exact revenge on the Armenians as soon as the British left the region. The Armenians, who realized that the crimes would not go unanswered, described the departure of the British as a disaster precisely for this reason (5). The British Ministry of War said that they would not allow even one battalion to remain in the Caucasus “even if all the Armenians of the region had their throats cut” (1).

There is no doubt that this decision had certain reasons. As we said earlier, Britain was more interested in keeping control of the colonies it gained during the war, especially the oil-rich Middle East region, rather than expanding its colonies and did not want to face the Bolshevik Russian threat in the region. Britain was more interested in Mosul oil. It is no accident that the region had been captured from Turkey and incorporated into newly-created Iraq. Britain would get a mandate over Iraq following the 1920 San Remo conference and compensate for what it lost in the Caucasus with this newly-created Arab country (For more details, see



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6, p. 52; 7, p. 201; 8, p. 194-195). Secondly, economic and financial issues had to meet Britain's national interests. Hostilities in the region could exert pressure on the British economy. In addition, British soldiers wanted to return to their country. In this situation, as a real way out, it seemed expedient to take a joint step in which obligations and expenses would be shared equally (9).

Thus, apart from the British mission led by Oliver Wardrop, a French mission led by Major de Nonacourt, a US mission led by Colonel William Haskell and an Italian mission led by Colonel M. Gabba came to the South Caucasus. However, France and Italy were hesitant about their interest in the region. France, which took over some of German and Ottoman colonies, had an extremely careful attitude to the colonies of the Russian Empire. As a rule, French politicians favoured the idea of a "united and indivisible Russia". As far as Italy is concerned, they avoided such a step for fear of confronting Russia and Turkey (10, p. 356).

As far as the United States is concerned, although Britain appealed to the USA after the Mudros treaty and asked the American army to take control of the South Caucasus, it failed to receive a positive answer from the United States (11, p. 9). In the process of

peace agreements in Paris, it was believed that the USA would solve the issue of Armenia. When the issue of Armenia was put up for debate by the Big Four in Paris, Lloyd George was very happy when President Wilson stated that they would accept the mandate with the consent of the US Senate. The prime minister was extremely pleased that the Americans would accept such a "noble mission" (12, p. 260).

Generalizing all this, one can draw the conclusion that while conducting its expansionist policy, Britain used the Dashnaks who acted on the scenario written in London (13, p. 256), did everything possible to support the Dashnak leaders who were ready to hand over their territory and military and economic potential to the Entente (14, p. 33) and in fact, prompted Armenia to make aggressive moves against Nakhchivan and Zangezur. As a result, Armenians, supported as part of Britain's political plans, carried out a policy of genocide in Azerbaijan and its integral part Nakhchivan.

Thus, although Britain did not create the "Greater Armenia" it promised as part of relations of mutual use and benefit, it closely participated in the establishment of the independent Dashnak Armenian state, which served as a tampon state between Turkey and the Turkic world,



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placed Armenians as a barrier to Turkic unity, created a shield against pan-Turanism in line with its national and geopolitical interests and thus accomplished its mission. In other words, the establishment of an Armenian state was the goal of Britain and the Entente in general and played the role of the “main obstacle” to pan-Turanism, and millions of pounds were spent on this. In October 1918, Britain’s Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour said in a letter to the head of the Armenian national delegation, Boghos Nubar Pasha, that the creation of an Armenian state was one of the goals of the Entente, especially Britain (15). This letter is an open confession.

When you look at the crux of the issue, it becomes clear that had it not been for the will of the Entente, especially Britain, there would have been no talk about the establishment or existence of the Armenian state. French researcher Georges de Maleville says in his book “The Armenian Tragedy of 1915”: “The Armenian Republic, which was established on the ruins of the tsarist empire with Britain’s will and lived a short life (1918-20), was the only independent Armenian state in history” (16, p. 15).

As can be seen, the independent Dashnak Armenian

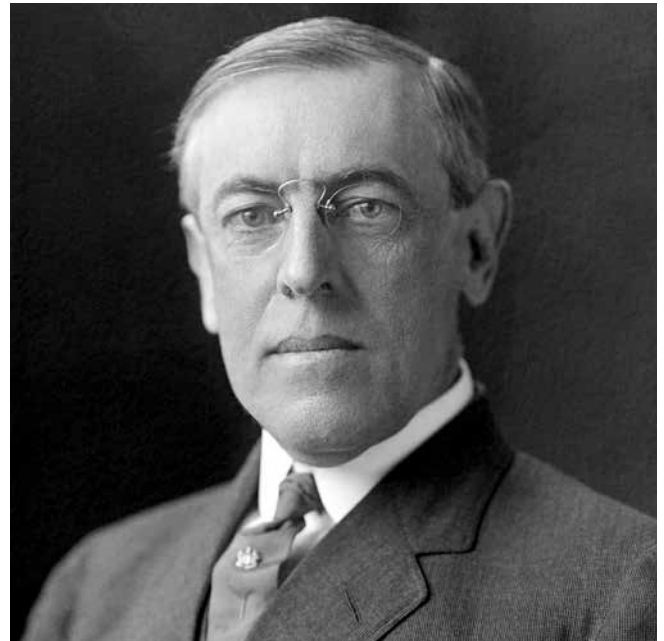
state was created precisely with Britain’s will and in line with its geopolitical interests. However, we have to note that unlike the plans of radical Armenian nationalists who cherished the idea of a “Greater Armenia”, the independent Armenian state was established not in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, but in the South Caucasus. There are certain reasons for that. If “Great Armenia” had been created in Eastern Anatolia, this state could have fallen not under British, but under Russian control. It is enough to remember that Russia founded the “Armenian province” in 1828, considered it to be a bridgehead for future attacks, instigated Armenians living in Eastern Anatolia with promises of independence and a “Greater Armenia” in order to use the “Armenian card” for partitioning the Ottoman state in the future and wished to seize Ottoman territories by placing them under its protection. Considering this likelihood, Britain exported the issue of establishing an Armenian state to the South Caucasus in order to keep Ottoman lands under control. There is no doubt that the creation of an Armenian state as a result of the conflict of geopolitical interests has left a heavy and deep mark on Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have to note that in order to maintain impartiality in studies on the impact of the "Armenian question" on Azerbaijan as it posed a great threat to Azerbaijan and at the same time, to Turkey and emerged as a result of various instigations, it is extremely important to address foreign archival materials. We believe that this study, which materialized on the basis of British archives, will make it possible to examine the policy of the great powers, especially Britain, on the "Armenian question" and give a greater assessment to the objectives and missions that characterize the policy conducted in the South Caucasus. British archival materials contain documents that played an important role in revealing the realities connected with the study that was conducted. The conclusion we arrived at on the basis of the documents that were acquired can be characterized as follows:

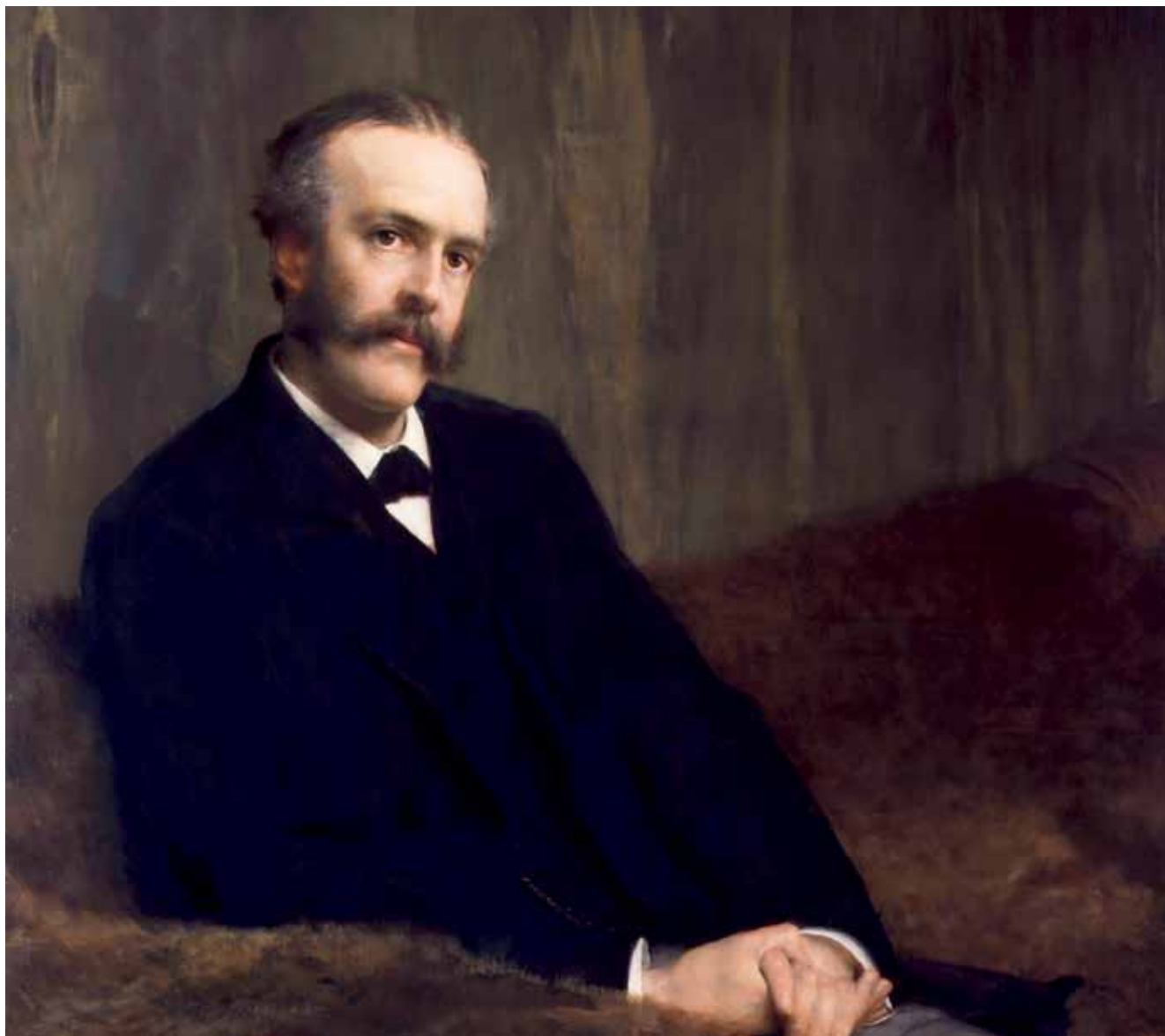
The Armenian question emerged as a result of the conflict of geopolitical interests of the great powers. This issue, which was once monopolized by Russia, gradually became a British monopoly as it ran counter to Britain's traditional policy. It is no accident that it was precisely Britain, which put the "Armenian question" on the agenda of the international political system. As is known, the Ottoman state was experiencing its weakest period at the end of the 19th century. Britain, which pursued a policy of protecting the territorial integrity of the Ottoman state from 1791 in line with its own interests, launched a policy aimed at seizing the richest and most strategic territories of the Ottoman state or at least increasing its control and influence over these territories after about 100 years, i.e. in the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-78 and the Berlin Congress, which was held in the same period. In other words, from that moment, Britain started pursuing a policy aimed at the downfall of the Ottoman state. First of all, this was linked with the protection of the road to India and seizure of new colonies.

The Armenian question was part of Britain's policy, and British-Russian rivalry played a great role in the emergence of this issue of global nature. By raising the Armenian question, Britain not only aimed to partition Ottoman lands and establish its hegemony over the partitioned territories, but also to prevent Russia from reaching the Mediterranean Sea. For Britain, which had become an unrivalled power due its victories, Ottoman lands with their rich natural reserves were extremely important. Being in rivalry for these lands with other great powers, Britain also prioritized the "Armenian question"



Woodrow Wilson

in its political plans together with various factors. While Armenians, who historically wanted to create a great and independent Armenian state, needed the Entente, especially Britain, for this purpose, the British also used the Armenians in a way that served their interests as a factor of propaganda and as a military means. The coup that happened in Russia in 1917 turned the Caucasus into an arena where the interests of the great powers collided. This situation strengthened British-Armenian cooperation in the Caucasus, and the conditions that came about brought the sides together in the context of mutual interests. Britain, which considered the Caucasus to be of strategic importance for its power in Iran, Afghanistan and most importantly, India, faced the threat of pan-Turanism in this region. Considering the likely establishment of Turkish hegemony in the near future, it was certainly necessary to create a shield between Turkey and the Turkic world in order to eliminate the source of the real threat to British positions in Asia. On the other hand, the takeover of the Caucasus by Turks could lead to negative consequences not only for Britain's regional, but also general interests. The takeover of Azerbaijan's oil reserves and Georgian mines and coal deposits by Turkish and German forces could scupper British plans. From this point of view, it was necessary to take measures with regard to the developments that were taking place. Armenians, who were provided with financial and military means following the departure of



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Russian military units from the front as a result of the Bolshevik coup, were used by Britain as a barrier against the Turkish and German threat in the South Caucasus. British-Armenian cooperation, which emerged as a result of relations of mutual use, was a source of disaster in many regions of Azerbaijan and led to the killing of thousands of Muslim Turks.

According to information acquired from British archival materials, after the British Foreign Office, War Cabinet, General Staff, Military Intelligence Service and other organizations decided to provide assistance to Armenians, large amounts of money were allocated and various kinds of weapons and ammunition were

delivered to the Armenians. It was as a result of this assistance that a policy of serious ethnic cleansing was implemented in Eastern Anatolia and many regions of Azerbaijan, including Nakhchivan in 1917-20. The political, financial and military aid that was provided was first of all linked to Britain's use of Armenians as the main shield and barrier against the threat of pan-Turanism, its obligations regarding the political future of the Armenians within the framework of relations of mutual use and the promises it made regarding independent Armenia.

The course of events showed that although the main purpose of Britain was to prevent the ideology of

pan-Turanism using the “Armenian” factor and cut the link and the corridor between the Turkic world, the consequence was large-scale crimes of genocide committed in region by Armenians who were supported from a political, economic and military point of view.

In conclusion, we have to note that although one of the greatest objectives of Britain was to create an Armenian state based on its obligations and promises, it kept the issue of establishing this state in Eastern Anatolia beyond its geopolitical interests and exported it to the South Caucasus, because Britain took such a step considering the likelihood of the Armenian state to be established in Eastern Anatolia falling under Russian control in the future.

Although the establishment of an Armenian state in the South Caucasus was the main result of the conflict of geopolitical interests, this policy can also be characterized as a threat to the Turkic civilization. Specifically, British attempts to hand over Nakhchivan, the “Turkic door” that secured relations between the Turkic world, to Armenians should be seen through this prism.

Of course, history remains history, and we cannot deny this. As the time changes, governments and political relations change too. Undoubtedly, the «Armenian question» was an extremely important tool for the British governments in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But we are faced with new realities. Nowadays, political, diplomatic, economic and cultural relations between two members of the globalizing world, Britain and Azerbaijan, are taking their course. As a state that supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, Britain is currently extremely interested in a peaceful settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group.

In conclusion, I feel dutybound to note that during my research in London, the staff of the British National Archives demonstrated a good and polite attitude to me and helped me to acquire the necessary documents. I express my profound gratitude to the staff of the British National Archives for their good attitude and assistance. ❀

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